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PROJECT CORONA

1. Due to the requirement that has been generated by the rapid technological advancement by the Russians, a reconnaissance-intelligence satellite program that provides aerial reconnaissance in support of national intelligence objectives has been developed and is operational. This program is known as CORONA.

2. The system used to acquire this reconnaissance employs a two stage earth-circling satellite vehicle, the first stage being a Thor boost and the second stage a Lockheed Agena Engine. There is a recoverable nose cone portion carried that returns exposed camera film to the earth's surface for intelligence photo exploitation.

3. To date, the system has acquired photography over the USSR, portions of China, and the satellite countries. Average ground resolution has been 20 to 25 feet on a side and approximately 3,000,000 square miles of this territory has been photographed where the cloud coverage has been Category III or better (clear to 4/8 cloud coverage). Major items of intelligence significance include new airfields, new activity, build up and defense strengthening of major missile test sites and construction areas, and new SAM locations. The system has also demonstrated a capability for obtaining photography with extremely low sun angles.

4. Information to improve current maps and charts, target folders, and information to revise and support combat operations has also been obtained with this system. The data has augmented information available from other sources and should provide the basis for operational direction of other intelligence gathering activities.

5. There are currently eleven scheduled missions, utilizing this system, remaining to be accomplished by 1 January 1962. During this period a new camera and film will be used that will improve the ground resolution and quality of the returned product.

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6. A follow-on program has recently been approved that will utilize the Thor-Agena recoverable payload vehicle which will carry the camera and film payload necessary to obtain stereographic photography. Six such missions have been approved and the first launching has been scheduled for the early spring of 1962.

7. Operationally OPD has the capability to program the area over which the satellite vehicle will operate the camera; has established necessary control and communication procedures to implement command decisions as to when the camera will operate or not operate; and has organized and tied together the necessary channels to obtain weather forecasts and briefings on which to base such command decisions.

8. In addition to the CORONA program OPD is also engaged in certain operational activities of the ARGON program. This program uses the same satellite vehicle and launch boost as the CORONA program and carries a film payload which is also recoverable. The primary mission of the ARGON vehicle is for geodetic survey and purpose, not as an intelligence gathering device. By charter agreement, OPD provides operational reports control procedures, Headquarters control room coverage and action, security precautions, cover inputs, [redacted] R&D assistance, PIC facilities, [redacted] communications, and obtains necessary political approval for ARGON missions. Vital field support is also provided.

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9. There has been one unsuccessful attempt to complete an ARGON mission since 1 January 1961. Five ARGON missions are scheduled for launchings during the months of April, June, July, and August 1961. No follow-on programs have been approved or presented.